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ABSTRACT

This paper asserts that there have not been adequate studies about the comparative quality of Turkish universities to provide information and data for prospective students, advisors, university administrators, and policymakers. Turkey has more than 70 state and private universities. Most of these are relatively new, although Turkish higher education dates back to the 11th century, Higher education quality assessment, rating, and ranking research would facilitate competition among higher education institutions and provide the basis for further studies of Turkish higher education. (Contains 23 references.) (SLD)

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# Quantity Versus Quality in Turkish Higher Education

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# QUANTITY VERSUS QUALITY IN TURKISH HIGHER EDUCATION

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*ABSTRACT*

*There has been no enough source on reputational and statistical studies about the comparative quality of Turkish universities to provide information and data for prospective students, advisors, university administrators, and policy makers. Such quality assessment, rating, and ranking research would facilitate competition among institutions and schools, improve quality of education and inform interested parties regarding their needs, and provide databases for future studies in Turkish higher education.*

*KEY WORDS: Educational Administration, educational policy, higher education.*

## INTRODUCTION

Turkey has more than seventy state and private universities. Though most Turkish universities are relatively new, and were reorganized in 1924, Turkish higher education dates back to the Nizamiye Madrasa founded by Seljuk Turks in Baghdad in the 11$^{th}$ century (Akyuz, 1994: 30-54). This Turkish-Islamic institution, or "madrasa," offered courses in religion and rhetoric, as well as in philosophy, mathematics, astronomy and medicine. Unlike western universities, which evolved from medieval European universities, starting with Bologna in 1088, Turkish universities did not evolve from the madrasas. On the contrary, they were all closed down immediately after the Proclamation of the Republic (Higher Education Bulletin, 1995: 1-15), because the madrasas were perceived as obstacles to the newly established Turkish republic,

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due to their firmly rooted religious and

philosophic structures. Even though they were all closed after the Proclamation of the Republic, their historical and cultural heritages have continued to the present.

In the relatively short period of time since the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the number of universities, students, and faculty has increased dramatically. The number of universities, for instance, increased from 1 to 72; student enrollment rose from 2,914 to 1,412,248; and the number of academic staff increased from 307 to 63,866 (The 1999-2000 Academic Year Higher Education Statistics). These changes indicate that the higher education system has been structurally reshaped through increasing numbers of students and schools, as well as through an evolving educational philosophy.

In 1983, the number of students in higher education was 322,320, of which 40,874 were enrolled in the Open University, with faculty in all higher education institutions totaling 19,757 (Tusiad Report, 2000: 29). The remarkable increase in enrollment rates grew from the 1980s to the present with the number of students increasing to 1,412,248 and the number of faculty increasing to 63,866 in 1999 (Table 1). As a result of this increase, the participation rate in higher education increased from 7.1 percent in 1982 to 26.1 in 1998. In the last 18 years, this increase represents a more than four-fold rise in enrollment since 1982. This rise could be interpreted as a transformation:a formerly elite structure becoming a mass university system. Also, it is interesting to note that the total enrollment in the Open University got close to the total enrollment of formal universities in the 1990s (TBMM Budget Report, 1999), because

organized (formal)

education could not respond to the increasing demand from prospective students.

The increase in the number of faculty has not been as high as the increase in student enrollment. Hence, the number of faculty clearly has not kept up with the growth in the enrollment of the 1990s (The 1999-2000 Academic Year Higher Education Statistics). Accordingly, the Government of Turkey has expanded its graduate scholarship program. Between 1987 and 1992, 1,410 students were awarded scholarships by the government for graduate study abroad. Beginning with the 1992-1993 academic year, under the expanded program and over a six-year period, scholarships for 6,400 students were awarded for studying abroad (Higher Education Bulletin, 1995: 1-15). Yet, these endeavors have not been adequate to meet increasing demands, nor

Table 1. Number of Students and Faculty Members, 1983-2000, by Years

| Years | Total | Formal | Open | No of Faculty |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1983-1984 | 322,320 | 281,446 | 40,874 | 19,757 |
| 1984-1985 | 398,145 | 332,729 | 65,416 | 21,949 |
| 1985-1986 | 449,807 | 350,744 | 99,063 | 22,968 |
| 1986-1987 | 481,600 | 357,796 | 123,804 | 24,382 |
| 1987-1988 | 495,628 | 362,042 | 133,586 | 26,611 |
| 1988-1989 | 551,668 | 376,495 | 175,173 | 28,114 |
| 1989-1990 | 645,400 | 416,540 | 228,860 | 31,190 |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1990-1991 | 705,409 | 444,447 | 260,962 | 33,652 |
| 1991-1992 | 759,049 | 469,302 | 289,747 | 34,280 |
| 1992-1993 | 854,950 | 525,876 | 329,074 | 37,580 |
| 1993-1994 | 1,072,312 | 561,071 | 652,374 | 41,411 |
| 1994-1995 | 1.096,070 | 618,755 | 477,315 | 43,103 |
| 1995-1996 | 1,150,137 | 690,677 | 459,460 | 49,234 |
| 1996-1997 | 1,213,165 | 749,970 | 463,195 | 52,744 |
| 1997-1998 | 1,322,345 | 825,095 | 497,250 | 53,444 |
| 1998-1999 | 1,374,457 | 881,897 | 492,560 | 59,170 |
| 1999-2000 | 1,412,248 | 923,679 | 488,569 | 63,866 |

Source: Higher Educational Council of Turkey, 2000.

have they maintained or improved the quality of higher education in Turkey. Increasing demand and political pressure have forced university administrators to enroll more students than their capacities allow (Guvenc, 1998: 87-115; Koksal, 1998: 45-82; Kaya, 1984: 235-186). The higher education system has dealt with expansion problems primarily through the widening of systems (i.e., by founding new universities, constructing new buildings, hiring additional personnel, and pouring additional money into them without designing new and appropriate structures and organizational forms). In such a non-competitive system, university administrators have not scrutinized the quality of education, nor have prospective students, parents, and policy makers asked for educational quality in higher education institutions.

Higher education institutions are distributed across a large geographical area. These universities vary enormously in size and quality. Despite the immense range in quality among universities and the enormous number of students they serve, there are few sources available to provide prospective students, campus administrators, policy makers, parents and other interested parties with accurate information about the comparative quality of Turkish universities (Akyuz, 1994: 82-105). State government, university administrators, associations, and the Higher Education Council have never published any quality ranking of their members. Even college catalogues, brochures, and "view books" have rarely been published, and universities have provided no information about how they compare to others in important characteristics.

Thousands of prospective students have flowed to higher education institutions in order to pursue bachelor's degrees with little comparative information about which are the best institutions or the best professional schools, departments, and programs (Akyuz, 1994: 130-154). Students are admitted to higher education through a central competitive entrance examination organized and administered by the Student Selection and Placement Center. Higher education institutions have never felt any need nor any internal or external pressure to attract prospective students or to improve the quality of education, because the number of students attending institutions of higher education dramatically increased from 322,320 to 1,412,248 in 18 years (TBMM Budget Report, 1999). Accordingly, the important issue in the Turkish higher education system has been the problem of capacity rather than quality. Academic quality assessment, rating, and ranking have never been significant issues in higher education (Koksal, 1998: 80-127). Consequently, there is an increasing need for available information and data on academic

quality to assist students and advisors in matching students'career goals with the facilities and opportunities available in the relevant undergraduate institutions; to inform the practical judgment of university administrators, policy makers, and managers of public and private funding agencies; and to provide a large, current database that can be used by scholars who focus their work on characteristics of the higher educational system and its associated research enterprise (NRC 1995, and NCS, 1982).

Turkish higher education, like American higher education in the transition of the 1960s and 1970s, faces a constant demand for more educational institutions. After higher education administrators solve the capacity problem, adult enrollment may increase in higher education institutions. Once the number of both state and private universities rise and enrollment stabilizes, competition among Turkish universities will intensify.

It seems that higher education will continue undergoing structural changes regarding rising student enrollment, more faculties, and capital construction during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Even though it is impossible to predict with any certainty, it is perhaps possible to speculate about and to identify some underlying developments by looking back at the history of higher education in Turkey. Higher education has faced two central problems in the latter part of the present decade: a rapidly increasing student demand for higher education institutions and a shortage of faculty and physical capacity (The 1997-1998 Academic Year Higher Education Statistics). The ongoing trend can be observed that two central problems are being added of by two goals of the Higher Education Council.

First, over 15,000 students will have been sent abroad by sponsoring universities in Turkey to return as future faculty where they will reach the level of associate professor

by 2010 (Higher Education Bulletin, 1995). Hence, the demography of faculty will change with more young members and this development would cover the shortage of faculty in Turkish universities. Second, the newly established universities will complete construction of new buildings by the end of 2010. Additionally, the number of private universities will increase to one-third the number of state universities; it is noted that 22 private universities were established in the last 10 years alone. As a consequence of these expected developments the existing demand for higher education would be met by the first decade of the twenty-first century. Furthermore, increasing demand by adult students for undergraduate education will change the demography of the existing campus structure. Finally, state universities may increase tuition to meet rising educational costs with changing student structure, so as to compete successfully with private universities and state subsidies will probably decrease over time. With these expected changes in the demographics of students and faculty, higher education will emphasize educational quality more than ever in order to remain viable in the system's shifting structure. The importance and need for quality assessment, rating, and ranking studies will increase among institutions, faculty members, administrators, policy makers, and prospective students in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Quality assessment studies will positively contribute to this ongoing quality assessment process in Turkish higher education by providing a database and other unexplored information about the academic quality of schools and institutions.

Why is it so important to know which colleges or schools are better than others and which colleges and schools are on the top ten list? Such obsessions seem to be revealed as part of the inherited democratic culture in which competition and excellence

are central values (R. Miles Uhrig, 1996: 32). Whatever the reason, the fundamental point is that quality assessment implies that some kind of consistency exists in the perception of quality. While no absolute consistency is possible, there are some attributes of quality upon which scholars can agree.

The concept of quality is as elusive as it is pervasive in higher education, since compiling educational rankings is at best a complex process. However, while business rankings are compiled on simple objective measures, such as company or industry assets, billings, sales and other quantifiable and measurable statistics, educational rankings involve much more complex measures such as academic reputation, faculty resources, faculty productivity, student selection, citation analysis, peer evaluation, student achievement, application rate, test scores, library and computer facilities, and other absolute measures (The Gourman Report, 1996: 1-3).

Even though there is no universal agreement on the concept of quality assessment in higher education, there is no disagreement about the importance of assessing quality (Dolan 1976: 5-12, Schmitz 1993:227-244, Webster 1986:56-85, 1992: 118-132, Tan 1986:223-265, Balderston 1994: 96-125). As implied above, arguments concerning academic quality ranking stem from the tools to the indicators of quality assessment (Schmitz 1993: 24-58). Each employed tool or indicator, however, implies a level of consistency similar to that of the whole population. It also implies that academic quality indicators explicitly indicate relative quality among institutions, despite the fact that there is no absolutely certain means of measuring institutional quality itself. Furthermore, it should be noted that each school or university could indicate varying performance in assessing quality since each university or school has its own identity, individual

characteristics, and some evidence of its physical and logical separateness (Weick, 1976:1-19).

The higher education system requires both coordination of the whole and differentiation of the parts. In higher education, the concept of differentiation is manifested by the existence of institutional diversity (Birnbaum, 1988: 107-145). However, it does not mean that educational quality in higher education institutions cannot be assessed due to this diversity, but rather that institutional studies of academic quality assessment are critically important, not only it more effectively meet institutional and societal needs, but because it, also, leads to the kind of stability and quality improvement that protects higher education institutions themselves.

There has been a long history in academia of attempting to use reputational approaches and objective indicators to assess academic quality in schools and institutions, dating back to the pioneering work by Hughess (1925/1934). Interest in the recent assessments produced by the National Research Council (NRC, 1995) is reflected in the coverage and series of articles that have appeared since its publication (e.g., Ehrenberg & Huss, 1996a, 1996; Grunig, 1997; Maher, 1996; Webster & Skinner, 1996). Academic quality assessment has been an enduring concern in literature among educators, researchers, students, parents and policy makers. Today, a variety of social forces have made academic quality perhaps the single most important issue in higher education. Hence, much recent literature focuses upon the assessment of institution, school, and program quality. These studies are aimed primarily at assessing and ranking programs and, at times, entire colleges and universities. In these studies, quality is assessed either through a "reputational" approach or/and through an approach based on "objective"

indicators of quality.

The validity of current studies might be less in question had they been developed systematically, beginning with careful definitions of an underlying construct and proceeding to the development and testing of standardized measures (Schmitz, 1993: 182-209). The reputational method and objective data have served as the major way of evaluating institutions and program quality at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

The advantages of assessing quality in colleges and schools are founded upon some major realities. First, there are few sources of useful comparative information about colleges. Second, quality assessment can help students to choose the alternative best for them. Third, colleges and universities have few standardized means of reporting important information about themselves. Finally, colleges and universities could improve their facilities to raise their standing in the rankings, which would certainly be one important benefit of rankings (Webster, 1992: 234-304).

## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

This study is intended to indicate the importance of quality assessment studies in Turkish higher education institutions. This kind of studies provides some kind of data that is important to them, since they will provide both an overall comparative perspective about their universities and some specific information about their schools, such as the number of published articles and books. Administrators, for instance, may be most interested in how their institutions were assessed and compared with other institutions and they would have access to comprehensive information about their institutions upon which they can base any attempt to improve the quality of their institutions. Policy makers may find it useful to focus on national and regional trends across disciplines.

They can provide comparative data on public and private universities, which may help policy makers allocate resources more appropriately and fairly among institutions. Rectors and deans will be able to compare the size, faculty resources, faculty productivity, academic quality and other characteristics of their undergraduate programs with those of other universities and schools in the same field. Prospective students may be most interested in comparing institutions and schools with the profile of variables most likely to affect their choices.

As a consequence of this kind of studies, prospective students and advisers will be assisted in matching students' career goals with the facilities and opportunities available in relevant undergraduate institutions; the practical judgment of university administrators, policy makers, and managers of public and private funding agencies can be better informed; a large and recent database that can be used by scholars who focus their work on characteristics of the higher educational system and its associated research enterprise will be provided; and comparative data between public and private institutions and schools that can stimulate some administrators to improve educational quality in their institutions will be available.

The State Government has paid attention to the enrollment numbers in higher education institutions more than the quality of undergraduate education, which is due to high demand and limited enrollment capacity. However, numbers are not a subsitute for quality nor are they interchangeable concepts. The state government should pay more attention to the quality of undergraduate education because the higher number of students does not mean that they will meet the needs of qualified work power for the developing countries.

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